

**TV
ETC**

The Vancouver Educational Telecommunications Consortium

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We write this letter with concern regarding a pending bill in the U.S. House of Representatives, HR 3146, the "Video Choice Act of 2005" and HR 2726, the "Preserving Innovation in Telecom Act of 2005" and Senate Bill 1349.

These bills are disconcerting. While they purport to increase competition and choices in cable television, in reality, they erode local control and could hurt our schools and community.

If passed, these bills would preempt all current franchise agreements between the cable company, (Comcast Cable in our case) and the City of Vancouver and Clark County. There would be no local franchising authority effective immediately upon passage.

Major provisions in the bills:

No local control of customer service issues.

No collection of 5% cable franchise fees.

Restricts (PEG) Public, Educational and Government channels to 4.

Eliminates all PEG support including capital and operating grants.

No universal service commitments to rural and low income communities.

Clark County schools and our community have benefited greatly from this franchise agreement for many years. Why is this so? Clark County schools provide local programming on three educational channels: Channels 27, 28 & 29. We have provided over 15,000 hours of programming directed at our own local community in 2004 alone. We use the channels as a vital communications tool to inform Clark County residents about their schools.

Programming enjoyed by Clark County cable subscribers:

- *Homework Helpline*, a three-times-a-week 90-minute live program that answers viewer's questions on Math, Science, English and Social Studies. In 2004, *Homework Helpline* received 2000 calls from students in Clark County looking for help.
- *Evergreen School District's Clark County Game of the Week, Friday Night Football, Vancouver School District Sports, Battle Ground High School Sports* which includes coverage of football, volleyball, soccer, basketball, baseball and wrestling.
- Coverage of band and choral concerts.
- Coverage of U.S. History Pageant, Veteran's Day Assembly, the Children's Cultural Parade, and high school graduations.
- Vancouver School District's *In Focus*, and Evergreen School District's *YES-TV*, two news magazine programs that highlight school initiatives, teachers, students and school reform.
- *4th Grade Problem of the Week*, a series focusing on strengthening 4th graders' math skills and preparing them for successful completion of the Washington State Assessment Learning tests.

How would this pending legislation affect us and this type of local programming?

Comcast Cable would no longer be required to collect Public, Education and Government Access fees from subscribers for capital purchases. Currently, Comcast collects \$1 per subscriber per month for capital grants for PEG providers. Clark County schools have been awarded PEG Capital grants to furnish schools with the necessary video and audio equipment to make these programs a reality. Schools contribute, also. Clark County schools provide the operating costs and buildings necessary to staff video productions. With the passage of this bill, schools would have the financial burden of capital costs for equipment as well.

In all practicality, schools are unlikely to continue funding both operating and capital expenses for local cable television because of budget constraints. If this legislation - as written - passes, local educational programming may not continue. We ask that you consider this in your decision. Please contact us if you have any questions of us.

Thank you for your consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,

Rose Yandell
TV ETC Coordinator,
Educational Service District 112
For the TV ETC members representing 90 schools and over
90,000 students

